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ZNY CCCCC ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4323
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 1852
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 5736
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE 0104
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SINGAPORE 001983

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SN](#) [BU](#) [ASEAN](#)
SUBJECT: GAMBARI READY TO GO TO BURMA; SEEKS U.S.
"UNDERSTANDING"

REF: A. BEIJING 6851

[1](#)B. JAKARTA 2946

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia L. Herbold, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador sought a detailed readout of UN Special Advisor Gambari's regional consultations on Burma on October 30 and pressed him to work for specific modalities and outcomes during his early November visit to Burma. Gambari said his consultations had helped "bridge the gap" between Singapore and other ASEAN countries in their stance on Burma and had increased pressure on China and India to be more helpful. Meanwhile, UN SYG Ban Ki-moon was pushing Burma to allow Gambari full access and control over his visit schedule. Gambari said he hoped to "kick-start" a genuine dialogue between the regime and its opponents, would seek a UN role in the dialogue, and would report to the UN Security Council (UNSC) upon his return to New York. Gambari requested that the USG show "understanding" for the importance of his regional consultations and the SYG's efforts to gain his early return to Burma and avoid characterizing this as a "make or break" visit to Burma. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) UN Special Advisor on Burma Ibrahim Gambari initiated a meeting with the Ambassador on October 30 and briefed on his consultations over the past two weeks in seven regional countries, including Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, China and Japan. Gambari is in Singapore waiting for permission to return to Burma to continue his "good offices" mission on behalf of UN SYG Ban Ki-moon, which he hopes will be granted within days. Gambari said that his consultations had helped "bridge a gap" between Singapore and other ASEAN members over how forceful the organization's stance on Burma should be and had put pressure on China and India to be more helpful in engaging the regime. He argued that ASEAN and China had come a long way in recent weeks in their approaches to Burma.

Pushing for a Productive Visit

[1](#)3. (C) Noting the need to maintain momentum and press the regime to end its violent crackdown, the Ambassador asked about the status of Gambari's planned visit to Burma. She stressed the importance of Gambari's having control over his schedule and access to all concerned parties, and of allowing Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) and Burma's opposition to judge

whether progress was being made before there were any public statements to that effect from outside parties. The Ambassador also urged Gambari to press the regime to allow international humanitarian organizations access to detainees. She asked whether regional actors would be willing to go beyond strong public statements if Burma continued to refuse to change in spite of Gambari's efforts.

14. (C) UN SYG Ban had been doing everything possible to gain Gambari's early entry to Burma, Gambari told the Ambassador. The Burmese had agreed to move the visit up to the first week of November, but had still not provided a specific date, though he hoped permission might be granted as early as November 1. He said the SYG had been pressing the regime to allow Gambari full access to all relevant parties, control over his schedule, and the freedom to stay in Burma as long as he felt necessary. He recalled that the regime had agreed in principle to his requests during his last visit for International Committee of the Red Cross access to detainees, permission for a return of Human Rights Rapporteur Pinheiro, and the appointment of a regime liaison to ASSK and the opposition. There had been indications of progress on all fronts, including the appointment and initial meeting with ASSK of the designated liaison (and newly appointed Labor Minister) Aung Kyi.

The Gameplan

15. (C) Gambari said he had never met Aung Kyi but had heard favorable reviews of his handling of Burma's dispute with the International Labor Organization, during which he seemed pragmatic, serious and influential with regime leaders. He hoped to meet Aung Kyi to discuss the scope of discussions

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and press for a UN role. Noting the severe hardship and constraints under which ASSK operates, Gambari said it was "not fair" that ASSK should have to face the regime alone. He would report ASSK's assessment of the situation to the UNSC upon his return to New York. Commenting on ASSK's situation during his recent visit, Gambari said she was clearly in better health than during his last previous visit last November. He said she remains "unbroken" and determined to play a leadership role in Burma's transition.

16. (C) Gambari was unsure what additional steps regional actors might be willing to take if his visit did not produce concrete results. He noted that as a "good offices" mission without a UNSC mandate, his influence is limited. Nevertheless, he was encouraged by his regional consultations. While the regime is accustomed to isolation, it is deeply concerned about the views of the UNSC, China and India. Gambari thought China genuinely wanted to see progress before his next report to the UNSC. Upon returning to New York, he looked forward to convening a proposed Burma Core Group, to include the P-5 countries, Japan, India, Singapore (as ASEAN Chair), and Norway. (Note: Gambari added that he is flexible concerning a possible EU role in the Core Group, but that he does not want the Core Group to be "too big." End note.) He thought the United States could help within the Core Group by "leaning on" China and India. ,

Seeking U.S. "Understanding"

17. (C) Gambari said he had two specific requests for the USG: first, he asked that Washington "show understanding" for the importance the UN SYG attaches to Gambari's consultations throughout the region and for the SYG's efforts to gain Gambari's early entry to Burma. Second, he asked that the USG not characterize this as a "make or break" visit. Realistically, it would have to be part of a longer process in which initiating a genuine dialogue was a crucial first step.

¶8. (C) Gambari indicated the United States, particularly through the proposed Core Group, could help by encouraging China, India and ASEAN to send strong messages to Burma and not just "hide behind" the SYG good offices mission. He also suggested the USG should consider direct talks with the regime, which he described as almost totally isolated and likely to benefit from hearing our frank views. Gambari said China had reiterated its willingness to facilitate such talks.

Regional Consultations

¶9. (C) Gambari indicated that, at Singapore's request, he had pressed Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia to take a stronger position on Burma in the run-up to the ASEAN summit meetings here in mid-November. Gaps had appeared after Singapore, as ASEAN Chairman, issued an unusually strong statement on Burma during an ASEAN Foreign Minister's meeting in New York last month. Gambari said he had urged his ASEAN interlocutors to remain firm, reminding them that the international community had warmly welcomed the strong ASEAN statement. Among the more developed ASEAN countries, Gambari characterized Thailand as the "weak link" on Burma, but said it was important also to keep pressing Indonesia and Malaysia. He said he would try to visit Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia before the end of the year.

¶10. (C) Gambari said he had been encouraged by his visits to New Delhi and Beijing. His meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had produced the first public expression of Indian support for the SYG's good offices mission and private assurances that India would "send the right message" to Burma on the need for tangible results. Gambari's meetings in Beijing had produced public statements from State Councilor Tang that: affirmed that the status quo ante in Burma was not sustainable; urged the regime to respond to the legitimate demands of the Burmese people; encouraged steps toward (qualified) democracy; and supported the UN SYG's good offices mission, including an offer to help with technical details. Gambari argued that, along with China's support for the UNSC presidential statement and other

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UN efforts on Burma, this demonstrated a significant evolution in China's position on Burma.

Carrots and Sticks

¶11. (C) Gambari summarized the themes he had heard during his regional consultations. First, there is "coolness" toward the idea of sanctions. He argued that this does not mean there is no willingness to apply pressure, but rather that a combination of "carrots and sticks" is seen as more likely to succeed. He said his interlocutors supported a "time-bound," serious dialogue that should include a discussion of what the international community can do to help the people of Burma. Second, all voiced support for the SYG's good offices mission. Third, Gambari's consultations showed no support for alternative diplomatic structures, such as the Thai proposal for a contact group modeled on the six-party talks, which he said would allow the Burmese to "pick and choose" their interlocutors.

¶12. (C) Gambari said he had responded to expressions of support by indicating what kind of support he needed. First, countries should send clear messages to Burma that it must cooperate with his efforts in "concrete detail," such as by starting a genuine dialogue with the opposition, ending the violent crackdown, addressing economic hardship, and freeing political prisoners including Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK), and they should monitor the regime's compliance. Second, countries should support "enhancing the capacity" of his mission with additional staff, particularly if the UN is given a role in a dialogue between the regime and its

opposition. Gambari said he also asked for support for a Burma Core Group.

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